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ABSTRACT

This guide (with audiotape) offers information on helping students with disabilities become involved in developing their own Individualized Education Programs (IEP). The guide is organized into lesson plans which can be adapted to individual situations. Individual lessons focus on the following topics: (1) introductory work with students (such as talking about disabilities, relevant laws, and transition); (2) introducing the IEP (helping students look at and understand their own IEPs); (3) writing the IEP (focusing on students' present levels of functioning and goals); (4) getting ready for the IEP meeting; (5) participating in the IEP meeting; and (6) following up after the meeting. Appendices provide additional information on relevant laws, answers to a disability pre-test, and an outline of a presentation on the laws. A glossary and a list of 18 resources are also provided. The accompanying audiocassette presents teachers and parents discussing how they have helped students become active participants in the IEP process. (DB)

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Technical Assistance Guide

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Helping Students Develop Their IEPs

This guide is written for parents and teachers who would like to help students with disabilities become involved in developing their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). It is accompanied by an audiotape of teachers and parents discussing how they have helped students become active participants in the IEP process. NICHCY hopes that, together, the guide and the tape will answer many of your questions about involving students in planning their own education.

While the concept of involving students in developing their own IEPs may seem difficult at first, in fact, students have much to gain from being involved. During the process, they can:

- learn more about their strengths and skills and be able to tell others;
- learn more about their disability, including how to talk about and explain the nature of their disability to others;
- learn what accommodations are and what types of accommodations might help them succeed in the classroom;
- learn how to speak for themselves;
- develop some of the skills necessary for self-determination and independent decision-making;
- learn about the goals and objectives that form the basis for their education and why these goals and objectives are important for them; and, ultimately,
- become more involved in their own education.

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This guide is organized into lesson plans to help teachers use the student materials in their classrooms. However, parents can easily adapt the lesson plans to use at home with their child with a disability. These lesson plans are based upon the experiences of Marcy McGahee, a special education resource teacher who has worked with her students with disabilities for many years to involve them in the IEP process.

The plans are written in general terms, to facilitate their adaptation to other classrooms and other instructors, including parents. No indication is given as to how much time to devote to any one part of the lessons — **each reader must adapt the lessons to suit his or her own needs, schedule, and students.** The lessons plans are written with the assumption that readers have a copy of the *Student's Guide* audiotape and booklet to use with their students.

Some tips from the "experience files" of Marcy McGahee:

- Start working with students in the beginning of the year, when everyone wants to do their best.

- Tailor working with the IEP to the needs and abilities of each student. Not every student will be able to write his or her own entire IEP, but all should—and can—participate in some fashion. With some students, you may want to concentrate on only some of the IEP sections or on inviting and facilitating their participation in the process (e.g., describing strengths and interests, describing the disability, listing the accommodations that are needed, talking about future plans).

- Realize that this undertaking requires a commitment of time. Your students will certainly benefit, and they are sure to surprise their teachers, parents, and even themselves. However, be aware—talking to students about IEPs and devoting time to preparing for the IEP meeting *will take time.*

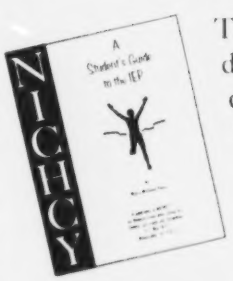
- Start slowly, devoting time each week to talking with students about themselves and their IEPs. Talk weekly with students about their strengths, needs, learning differences, academic goals,

When to Involve Students

According to the law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, students *must be* invited to participate in their own IEP meeting beginning no later than age 16, and younger, when appropriate. Parents and teachers can involve students at younger ages, of course, and it makes good sense to do so.

Students have a lot to say about themselves, their strengths, their needs, their interests and preferences, and what they would like to do in the future. Just ask them!

This booklet is about giving students the tools to answer effectively.



This guide and its tape are designed to be used in conjunction with NICHCY's *A Student's Guide to the IEP*, a package that also consists of a student booklet and an audiotape. The *Student's Guide* package is designed expressly to inform students about the IEP process and motivate them to become involved. The *Student's Guide* is available from NICHCY.

and plans for the future. Work with them via worksheets, class discussion, individualized work, and role-playing. By slowly building a foundation and progressively building upon it, this work will not seem too overwhelming or indepth for students.

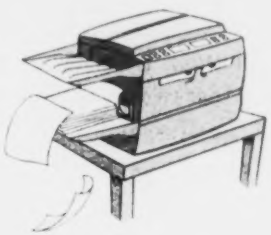
- Always tailor discussions and work to the needs and capabilities of your students. But don't underestimate them! As you well know, they can surprise you with their ideas, their understanding, and their desire and ability to participate and speak up for themselves.

- Celebrate each student's strengths and growth!

Laying the Foundation

1 Make sure that you have a copy of the *Student's Guide* audiotape for your students to listen to (for your convenience, the *Student's Guide* tape is on the reverse side of the tape for teachers and parents), as well as a copy of the *Student's Guide* booklet for each student. (Feel free to copy the booklet and tape; they both are copyright free.)

2 Photocopy each student's current IEP.



3 Read through each IEP and identify sensitive issues or areas where student questions are likely to arise. Pay special attention to "present levels of functioning," diagnosis, medications taken, accommodations required, or any information that students may not be aware of or that may be sensitive. Many students are not aware of the goals that have been established for them. Be prepared to address these and any sensitive issue in a positive, discreet manner.

4 Inform parents that students will be involved in the IEP process. You can convey this information by listing it on the syllabus you hand out on back-to-school night, by sending a letter home, or by phone. Invite parents to ask any questions they have about their child's involvement in the IEP process. Suggest to your students that they also discuss the IEP process at home. Many parents may already have a copy of their child's current IEP. If not, sending a copy home to the student's parents may be useful.

5 Prepare any worksheets, handouts, or other materials you intend to use during your presentations about the IEP. Inform yourself (and the student's family) about the laws supporting the rights of individuals with disabilities. (See Appendix A for information about several important federal laws. Also see the Resources section of this guide.)

Introductory Work with Students

The lessons below carry with them no indication of how much time they will take, individually or collectively. Each numbered item tends to be a separate activity, to allow teachers and parents to break up the discussions across days and weeks.

It's important to be consistent—and persistent. Begin the lessons early in the year. Once you begin, try to devote some time every day, every few days, or every week to these types of discussions and activities. Overall, the process *will take time*—but it is tremendously worthwhile to take that time, moving slowly, taking one piece of the puzzle at a time, giving students plenty of opportunities to discuss, reflect, practice, review, and practice some more.

All items should be considered as suggestions. **Each reader must adapt the lessons to suit his or her own needs and schedule and the capabilities and needs of students in the class.**

1 *Open the discussion.*

Introduce the topic of learning to students. Spend some time talking with students about learning—how they learn, what's easy for them to learn, what helps them learn, what's hard for them to learn, what they (or others) can do to help them learn what's difficult. Write their comments and observations down (without identifying specific students' learning techniques or difficulties) on a poster, overhead, or chalkboard. Look for similarities in learning approaches. Point out differences.

2 *Find out what your students already know.*

Administer a questionnaire similar to the one on page 5, which is designed to (a) give you an idea of what students already know; and (b) lay the foundation for a discussion about disability and have students focus for a moment upon *their* disability. (Possible answers to this questionnaire are presented in Appendix B.)

Make sure students realize this isn't a test, just a way of gathering information and starting a discussion.

Possible adaptations:

- Some students may be able to work on the questions independently. Others may need to go over the questions as an individualized activity or merely listen to the class discussion that follows.

- If your students have serious difficulties with reading or writing, you may wish to simply ask students these questions and write their answers and comments down on the board or an overhead. Be prepared, however, for some silence and blank looks. Unless students have previously been involved in developing their IEPs, in all likelihood they will have difficulty answering these questions or not be able to answer them at all. If this happens, reiterate that this is not a test but a way of letting you know that you and the class will be starting your discussions with the "basics" about the IEP.

3 *Give students a positive look at what's ahead.*

After the questionnaire, it may be a good idea to tell students why the class has been talking about learning and why you asked them questions about something called an IEP. Some suggestions:

- Be brief and positive. The idea is to give students an overall context and unifying thread for the discussions and work you'll be doing in the months ahead.

- Tell students that, throughout the year, the class will be working on special lessons that will help them take part in planning their education.

Student Worksheet

Disabilities

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge.

1. How do *you* learn best? What type of lesson really helps you learn? (For example,you like to read new information or hear it first, or you prefer to work in small groups or alone...)

2. What is a disability?

3. Do *you* have a disability?

4. There is a law that allows you to receive special services from the school. What's the name of the law?

5. What is accommodation?

6. Do you have any accommodations in your classes?

7. What's an IEP?

8. Do *you* have an IEP?

- Tell students they have the right to be involved in planning that education, and that you (their teacher), their parents, and other school personnel want to know what *they* think—what they want to learn, what they feel they need to learn, what type of help really helps, what they want to do in the future.

- Tell them you're looking forward to hearing their ideas, because it's *their* education and their input is valuable and *valued*.

4 *Talk about disabilities.*

Refer the class back to the item about disability on the questionnaire. Discuss, as a class, what disabilities are, the range of disabilities in the class and in the world in general, and some of the differences between disabilities. Ask students what's hard for them because of their disability, and what types of special help they find useful. Be sure to contrast this with references to their strengths and what they find easy. For example, "So you have trouble writing, which makes taking notes hard, but you sure listen well and you remember what you hear."

5 *Show a film or video about disabilities.*

Consider showing a film/video about disabilities to your students. Preview the film/video first and make sure that the content is appropriate for and won't be insulting to your students. For example, don't select a film/video about young children with disabilities; identify one that is age-appropriate. (The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education has a database on available videos. You can contact the ERIC Clearinghouse at 1-800-328-0272.)

6 *Tell students briefly about the laws.*

Present information to students about the "Laws" (see Appendix A for a summary of the laws you may wish to mention) and their rights under these laws.

If you require students to make presentations in your class, this presentation on the laws is a good opportunity to model for them what you want in a presentation. For example, Ms. McGahee requires that student presentations have four components, and so her presentation on the laws incorporates the four components, which are:

(a) a *keyword poster*, where the student who is presenting writes down the keywords (not sentences) associated with the presentation; this helps students remember the information they are presenting and helps their listeners to take notes;
(b) a *visual* to support the presentation;
(c) *note-taking* — listeners must take notes on the presentation, usually tied to the keyword poster; and
(d) a *review* after the presentation is finished.

(An example of these components, used in Ms. McGahee's presentation on the laws, is presented in Appendix C.)

7 *Discuss accommodations.*

Specifically discuss the concept of "accommodations" with the class. Refer students to the list of accommodations on page 10 in their booklets. Ask them what types of accommodations or special help are useful to them. You may be amazed at how simple—and astute—their answers are!

8 *Discuss transition.*

If you are working with students who are 16 years old—or, in many cases, younger—you will want to introduce the importance of transition planning. Within a few years students will be leaving secondary school, and it will be highly useful for them to consider what lies ahead for them.

Transition planning includes discussing and planning for such areas as the student's: employment, postsecondary education (including vocational training or adult education), independent living, eligibility for various adult services (such as vocational rehabilitation), and community participation.

Your initial discussion with students about transition can be brief, just an introduction to the concept, with more indepth discussion taking place later, or it can extend across weeks.

This is a ripe area for class discussion and student activity, as well as being vitally important to helping students make the transition from school to postschool settings, so be sure that the class (and each individual student of transition age) eventually looks at transition in some depth. (See Resources section of this guide for materials designed to help educators and parents help students with transition planning.)

Some questions you might consider to get the discussion rolling:

What types of things can we do after we get out of school? (study more, get some kind of training, work, participate in the community)
What would you like to do after you leave high school?
Do you know how to do that?
What do you need to learn to get ready for doing that?
What are your hobbies?
Do you want to study more after high school?
What types of jobs interest you?
And so on...

9 *Assign each student a "disability-related" question to be answered.*

For review purposes, or for more indepth exploration of the ideas presented to date, give each student a question about a particular disability or a word to be defined and explained. Examples:

Words to be Defined	Questions to be Answered
learning disability	What is an IEP?
auditory memory	How often does an IEP need to be done?
IEP	What is (name of disability)?
disability	What is 94-142?
accommodation	What is the IDEA?
emotional disorder	What is reasonable accommodation?
visual memory	What is an amendment?
traumatic brain injury	What is educational testing?
mental retardation	What is evaluation?
hearing impairment	What is due process?

Have each student look up the word assigned or find out the answer to the question assigned, then report the information to the class. Provide books to assist students in their research, such as books from a professional teacher's library or school library, their own books, or your own. Have students put the information they have discovered on posterboards, and display these boards around the classroom.

Possible adaptations: Of course, some students may not be able to do this activity without modification. If need be, adapt the basic idea of the lesson to the strengths and needs of your students. For example:

- If your students are not able to understand the words suggested above, change the words to be more appropriate for your students. For example, some of the words on the cover sheet of your county's IEP may be excellent words for your students to investigate: "participants", "disability", "evaluation."

- Students who do not read can gather information in other ways, such as conducting interviews, watching videos about disabilities, or collecting pictures about disabilities from newspapers and magazines.

- Use some commercially available disability awareness packages. These often explain the various types of disabilities in simple, clear ways.

We've provided a "glossary of terms" at the end of this document. Many short factsheets on disabilities are available from NICHCY as well.

Introducing the IEP

Again, the lessons and activities described below are merely suggestions. They will be time-consuming but will form the basis for student understanding of the IEP process and involvement in designing their own IEPs. Adapt the lessons as necessary for the needs and capabilities of your students.

Get yourself and your students ready to look at an IEP.

1 Prepare an overhead transparency or handout showing the type of IEP form your school or district uses. The IEP should be **blank**, waiting to be filled in. Also prepare an overhead or handout of a sample letter that the school might send home to parents to inform them (a) of the school's intention to evaluate the student, and/or (b) of an upcoming IEP meeting that has been scheduled. You will use these two items later on in this section.

2 Remind students that one of the class' long-term goals is to have them become more involved in their education—namely, helping to develop their own IEPs. Hand out the *Student's Guide* booklets.

3 Talk briefly with the class about the IEP process, from the letter sent home to parents to the IEP meeting. Indicate the seriousness of the process, that it is required by law. You can use pages 4–5 in the *Student's Guide* to organize this discussion or assign them as reading homework or seatwork.

4 Play the *Student's Guide* tape for the class and discuss the information presented there. To prompt students, you might ask them questions such as:

What's an IEP?
What are some benefits of students getting involved in their IEPs?
Do you want to get involved in saying what's in your IEP?
How do you think this would help you?
What would you want to say, if you were involved in your own IEP meeting?
What do you want your teachers to know about you? Your friends?
Are there parts of your education or school work you'd change? Why?
Do you think you'd need to talk about this more, to be able to participate?

Show an IEP.

5 Using your overhead or handout of a **blank** IEP, go over what an IEP is, what it looks like, what the various sections are. *This activity can be fairly brief, and should be for the purposes of giving students a brief introduction to an IEP form.* Refer students to page 6 in their *Student's Guide* booklet, or write this information on a poster to support your discussion.

6 Go over the IEP sections one by one, talking generally about what type of information is to be included in that section. The most important sections to concentrate on, particularly in the beginning, are the parts of the IEP that describe the nature of the student's disability, "present levels of functioning," and "goals and objectives."

Suggestions:

- As you talk, give students concrete examples of the type of information that might go in each section. You may also consider showing an IEP that is filled out for a particular student, although be careful that the IEP doesn't belong to any student in the class and that all identifying information, such as the student's name and address, are thoroughly blacked out.

- Similarly, any examples you use should not correspond to any student in your class. If students volunteer personal information or examples, that's great, but sensitivity to students' feelings and their right to privacy is of paramount importance.

Have students look at their own IEPs.

7 Give each student a copy of his or her own IEP.

8 Put your copy of the **blank** IEP from the previous lesson up on the overhead. Using the blank copy as a guide, go over the various sections briefly.

The Importance of Privacy

When it comes time for students to look at their own IEPs, you have to consider carefully the privacy issue and the contents of each student's IEP. There may be information in the IEP that may embarrass or surprise the student, and certainly it is his or her right to have all information in the IEP remain private.

The experience of several teachers who have involved their students in the IEP process suggests that, the first time you have students look at their IEPs, students do not tend to share the information with others, and other students do not tend to "nose into" their classmates' IEPs. Each student tends to be absorbed in looking at his or her own document. As the class discusses the IEP—in general, not in regard to any specific student in the class—personal information may be gradually shared. Trust builds as all students become involved in the process. Yet, this activity must be handled in such a way that no student's privacy is invaded by others.

Suggestions for maintaining privacy and respecting each other's feelings:

- Many teachers begin this lesson with a simple statement regarding privacy and the importance of "minding your own business," or they wait until someone violates another's privacy and quietly suggest that "we all look at our own papers."

- When you first hand your students copies of their own IEPs, keep the lesson short and general. The purpose of the lesson is to give students an opportunity to see that they do, indeed, have an IEP, and to look at what it says *generally*. They'll have more opportunities in the future to delve into its specific contents.

Important! The most crucial aspect of this initial introduction to the IEP is not to have students understand all of the details of their own IEP; rather, the purpose of this introduction is to have students understand the overall: to see what the various sections of the IEP are; to understand that they have an IEP; to realize that, up to this point, they have not been involved in developing that IEP, but that they can be involved; and to realize how important their help is in developing their IEP. Don't get bogged down in the details at this point. All students will eventually sit with you, one-on-one, and go through their IEP in detail. This level of effort is not necessary in this initial introduction.

- Have students find their name, their grade, and other identifying information. Is it really their own IEP?

- Have students identify the date of the last IEP and project the date by which the next one must be developed. They can write this date on page 6 of their student booklet. Even if the next meeting is a year away, students can still work on the IEP and, if necessary, call for another IEP meeting to discuss changes.

- Point out the disability section of the blank IEP (if there is one). Have students individually find this section in their IEP. Have them silently read what it says, or you might move around the classroom and point this out to them. Do not dwell on this section; just have them identify that it exists and contains specific information about them and their disability.

- Use the same brief process to have students locate other sections of their IEP, such as "present levels of functioning," "accommodations," and "goals and objectives." Keep the discussion with the class brief, focused on the information generally, not its specifics. For example, are their goals and objectives divided into subject areas, such as reading, writing, mobility, and so on? Are any accommodations listed?

- Have students find (or you might move around the classroom and point out) the place where people have signed the IEP. Who has signed the IEP—their parents, an administrator, their teacher? Is their own signature there? Why or why not? Would they like to have their signature on their own IEP? If so, then they need to participate in the process.

- **Note:** If any of your students cannot read or have difficulty reading, there are a number of ways you can accommodate their needs. They can tape record your explanation and listen to it later, as many times as they like, or you might prepare a tape in advance and make it available to them. You can also go over the IEP with them, one-on-one, at a later time.

9 Let students ask questions about the content of their IEP. Some suggestions and observations:

- For particularly sensitive questions, you may wish to answer generally, saying, "If you want to know more, we can talk later." Be aware that, in the beginning, students may wish to keep personal information private.

- Students may have a lot of questions about the goals and objectives listed in their IEPs, such as "Where do these come from?" and "Why wasn't I asked?" As appropriate, and respecting student privacy, some discussion of student goals and objectives may arise. For example, you can have students cross out goals they feel they have achieved or reflect *generally* upon the goals and objectives that have been established for them. Do they recognize that the work they've been doing in school is tied directly to the goals and objectives listed in their IEP?

- Always encourage students to discuss their IEP with their family.

10 After you have examined the IEP form and process with students, and they have had the opportunity to reflect generally upon the goals, objectives, and other information listed in the IEP, put the IEPs aside, either collecting them or sending them home for students to discuss with their parents. Debrief, briefly discussing how students feel about their IEP, the process by which it is developed, and the prospect of their being involved in saying what goes into the document.

11 You may wish to play the Student Tape for them again, for its motivational impact. Review the experiences of the students on the tape and solicit your students' impressions and ideas.

Writing the IEP

Generally speaking, having a student work on writing his or her IEP for the coming year requires a combination of:

- class discussions
- seatwork
- one-on-one meetings with you and perhaps other teachers, and
- homework done either individually or involving parents (given parental willingness and time to be involved).

Work throughout the year on the various sections of the IEP, taking each one individually and slowly, following a process such as:

- Re-introduce the IEP section to the class (e.g., "Today we're going to take a look at that scary sounding part of the IEP called *present levels of functioning*") and review as a class what has been said previously about the section.

- Have students discuss as a class what *generally* might go in that section. Write their ideas on the board or overhead. Add your own ideas and examples, as appropriate.

- Have students read individually what this section of their own IEP says. This activity, very personal to students, may take place as seatwork, homework, and one-on-one meetings with you and/or the parents. Allow or encourage sharing only to the extent of student comfort. As students build trust and a sense of community about being involved in developing their IEPs, more sharing is likely to take place spontaneously and can be very beneficial and motivating.

- Always offset discussions about what students *can't* do with discussion of what they *can* do. For example, when discussing the disability and present levels of functioning sections, also discuss student strengths and abilities. When discussing goals and objectives, identify what goals and objectives students have already achieved, as well as the ones that still need to be addressed.

As time for a student's IEP meeting draws near, you may need to intensify individual efforts with that student, meeting one-on-one with him or her to work through the various sections and prepare a draft IEP to discuss at the meeting. These individual deetings, and the work the student produces as a result, will be significantly enhanced if they have been preceded by class review and discussion of the IEP throughout the year. In fact, some of the work may already have been done! You may find that these individual meetings are a terrific way of reviewing and re-emphasizing the IEP contents, student strengths and needs, and his or her preferences.

Here are some suggestions for organizing this individual work.

1 Make an appointment with the student whose IEP is in need of review. You can arrange to meet with the student during class, during lunch, or after school.

2 If the student can work independently, have him or her complete activities 1–4 under "Writing Your Own IEP" in the *Student's Guide* booklet. If the student needs support in these steps, then sit with him or her and go over the IEP.

3 Have the student work on a "strength" and "weakness" (need) sheet for each class (Activity 5 in the *Student's Guide* section "Writing the IEP"). Encourage the student to cover this area as completely as possible, so that the other IEP participants do not catch them offguard during the IEP meeting. When students are the first to mention an area of weakness—for example, a student might say that he or she is disruptive in a particular class—their credibility in the IEP meeting is increased. Also help the student to produce a balanced list of strengths and weaknesses; don't just have an enormous list of weaknesses, with only a few strengths or abilities to offset it!

4 Focus next on helping the student to describe his or her *disability*. Is there a term for the disability (i.e., learning disability, mental retardation, visual impairment)? In *practical* terms, what does this disability mean? (For example, the disability means it's hard for the student to learn new material, or see very well, or get from place to place, or participate in certain kinds of activities...) Be sure to incorporate mention of the student's strengths into this discussion of disability.

5 Move on to *goals and objectives*. Did the student achieve the goals that are listed? Have the student list those goals that were achieved and those that were not. What changes need to be made in the IEP, to account for student growth and continuing or new need? To help the student avoid listing too many goals and objectives, ask which five (or ten) goals and objectives he or she feels are *most important* to work on? Are these realistic? Achievable?

6 The student may find it extremely helpful and productive to make an appointment with each of his or her teachers, in order to identify and discuss goals and objectives appropriate for each class, as well as student strengths, needs, and reasonable accommodations in each class (Activities 6 and 7). Talking with therapists or other school personnel may also be helpful.

7 Many students will be able to contribute information regarding their "present levels of functioning." Most should be able to describe their disability and what accommodations are needed in school. Help each student to put these descriptions into acceptable language, but be aware that, in the IEP meeting, the student will often use his or her own words.

8 As appropriate, address accommodations with the student (see Activity 9 in the *Student's Guide*) and transition planning (see Activity 10). Transition planning is an area that is ripe for both class discussion and individual reflection. What plans does the student have for the future? What would he or she like to do or be? What types of training or experience does he or she need in order to prepare? How can the school help?

9 Work with the student to prepare a draft of the new IEP, incorporating the changes, the areas of need, and the accommodations suggested. Be sure to pay attention to the "evaluation" section of the IEP, too. This section is where the IEP team identifies how they will determine if the student has reached a goal or objective. Officially, this is called "evaluation criteria" and should include:

- precisely what the student has to be able to do (e.g., identify 10 out of 12 words correctly; make the correct change 9 out of 10 times; complete all homework assignments);
- how this information will be gathered (e.g., teacher-made tests, observations, student portfolio).

10 Have the student take the draft IEP home to share with his or her parents and to gather their input. Parents may have prepared their own draft, so that the family, together, discusses and develops a draft IEP that reflects both parental and student thinking. In any event, a final draft IEP needs to be prepared to take to the IEP meeting (Activity 11).

11 Have the student send invitations to all the individuals who will be involved in the IEP meeting. An invitation might look something like this:

An Invitation

Please come to my IEP meeting and share your ideas.

Date: Wednesday, October 23rd
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Place: Meeting Room 4

Signed,

(Student's Name)

p.s. If you cannot attend this meeting, please let me know when we can meet to talk about my IEP. Thank you.

Getting Ready for the IEP Meeting

1 Have each student practice his or her presentation for the upcoming IEP meeting. Most students will benefit from numerous opportunities to rehearse! Students can practice at home with their family and with each other, if several have meetings in the near future.

Here are some suggestions for student practice.

- You may want to have them roleplay, on separate occasions, describing their disability, their strengths, their needs, the accommodations that would help them achieve in class, their goals for the future, and the goals and objectives they feel are most important for them to work on. Also have them practice thanking other participants for attending the IEP meeting. (These roleplays, of course, must be tailored to individual student capability. Students who are not able to address all these IEP elements should concentrate on sharing whatever they are capable of—what they would like to do, or a few brief sentences about their disability, preferences, or strengths.)

- You can be involved in the roleplays as well. For example, you might take the part of the student, while the student plays the part of a teacher or principal.

  This allows you to model certain behaviors or responses the student may find useful in the actual IEP meeting. Then you'd switch roles, and the student would play himself or herself, responding or behaving appropriately.

Students may find it particularly helpful to see you model how to respond when other IEP participants want to add or delete goals or objectives. Students should understand that it is appropriate for them to either disagree or agree with the proposed change, and to say why they feel that way. However, this may be difficult for many students, particularly if they are caught by surprise.

You may wish to model making a response such as: "I would like to think about that suggestion. If we need to add it to the IEP, let's do it later."

Another situation for which students should be prepared is the possibility that another participant may say something negative that hurts or angers them. For example, a teacher might remark that "You have a chip on your shoulder" or "You never cooperate in class." Discuss with your students what types of responses might be appropriate. Model (and have students practice) appropriate responses such as "What suggestions do you have?"

2 Have the student work on maintaining eye contact with those listening, as well as volume and speed of delivery. It may be useful to establish some "cues" that you, or another participant, can use to remind the student if he or she is getting off track (e.g., not keeping track of the time, not maintaining eye contact, or speaking too loudly or softly). Practice these cues with the student.

3 If appropriate, have the student send out reminders to IEP participants a week before the meeting (see page 9 in the *Student's Guide* for an example).

4 Suggest to the other participants, before the meeting, that they not interrupt the student in the middle of his or her presentation. Discussion of issues can wait until the student has finished presenting.

During the IEP Meeting

1 All the hard work that the student (and you!) have done has come to this moment! Hopefully, all preparations, discussions, roleplays, and classwork will bear fruit in this meeting, as the student shares his or her ideas about what the IEP should contain.

2 The student may wish to greet all participants attending the IEP meeting, making sure that those who do not know one another are introduced. He or she should also make sure that all participants receive a copy of the draft IEP that he or she has prepared for discussion.

3 When the time is appropriate, the student will share his or her ideas with the rest of the IEP team. Depending upon his or her capabilities and degree of preparation, this sharing may range from describing his or her disability in a few sentences to actually leading the meeting. Whatever the level of participation, it's important that the student be able to share his or her ideas freely, without interruption. Hopefully, you have roleplayed in class what the student will say, and this part will go smoothly.

4 As mentioned above, there may be times when another participant says something that hurts or angers the student; describes the student in largely negative, nonconstructive terms; or proposes changes or alterations to the IEP that surprise the student. Any prior roleplaying you have done within your class may help the student respond appropriately in these situations. (Depending upon the level of the student's participation, and his or her ability to advocate, you may need to be the one who responds.) As necessary, help the student focus the discussion on positive steps that he or she can take, not on a recounting of his or her transgressions.

Note: One of the reasons for having students spend time developing a "Strength" and "Weakness/Need" sheet is to circumvent the likelihood that an IEP team member will make such negative statements. If the student has already pointed out in his or her presentation that one of his or her "weaknesses" is not doing the homework, or not participating fully in class, then this reduces the need for others to do so.

5 At the end of the meeting, the student should thank everyone for their active part in planning his or her school program.

After the Meeting

1 Praise the student. Regardless of mistakes, he or she has accomplished much today and needs to be told so.

2 Have the student tell the class what happened in the IEP meeting.

3 Monitor the goals and objectives throughout the year and encourage the student to be aware of and monitor progress as well. Are the goals being addressed? Is the student working toward achieving them? How is he or she progressing? Does the team need to come together again and change anything about the IEP? Goals? Classroom placement? Services being received? Have the student call another IEP meeting, if necessary. And be sure to prepare for that one, too!

4 And, as was said in the beginning of this guide, celebrate each student's growth! And celebrate your part in that growth!

Appendix A

Overview of the Laws

P.L. 94-142—
Education of All Handicapped Children Act

Also known as the Education of the Handicapped Act, or EHA. Passed in 1975. Has since been amended several times, including the 1990 amendment which changed its name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Provides federal funding to assist schools in educating students with disabilities.

The EHA (now IDEA) has many requirements. Among them:

- Schools must provide students with disabilities with a "free appropriate public education" and/or related services, as needed to meet their unique learning needs;
- Each student with a disability who receives special education must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP);
- The IEP is created just for that student and details the educational goals and objectives the student will address throughout the year;
- A student's IEP is developed in a collaboration between school personnel, the student's parents, and (when appropriate) the student; and
- A group of school personnel and parents (voluntary) must meet at least once a year to review and revise the IEP.

P.L. 101-476—
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

An amendment to the EHA (described above), passed in 1990. The requirements listed above remain intact under IDEA, and the following items have been added:

- Students of transition age (sixteen years or older and, in many cases, younger) must be invited to participate in the meeting where the IEP is developed;
- For students 16 years or older (and in many cases, younger), part of the IEP must be devoted to the transition services the student will receive to help him or her plan and prepare for life after high school.
- Transition planning includes discussing and planning for such areas as the student's: employment, postsecondary education (including vocational training or adult education), independent living, eligibility for various adult services (such as vocational rehabilitation), and community participation.

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P.L. 93-112—
Rehabilitation
Act of 1973

A civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Section 504 of the Act prohibits schools from excluding students with disabilities from participating in programs receiving federal funding, simply because they have a disability. Amended in 1992 by P.L. 102-569.

Important facts about Section 504:

- Section 504 defines a person with a disability as "any person who (i) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, (ii) has a record of such an impairment, or (iii) is regarded as having such an impairment."
- Major life activities are defined include self-care, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and walking.
- Schools, as recipients of federal funding, are, thus, prohibited from discriminating against students who meet the definition of a person with a disability. Accommodations must be made to assist students with disabilities to participate in school activities, including classes.

Appendix B

*Possible Answers to the Student "Disability" Pre-test**

1. A disability is...
a limitation
an area where you're challenged
something that makes it hard for you to (learn, walk, talk, see, hear...)

2. (individual response, based on student's situation and knowledge)

3. the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (formerly the Education of the Handicapped Act, EHA, or P.L. 94-142)

4. Accommodation is...
when people make changes that will help you participate in activities
changes in the way things are done, so you can learn better

5. (individual response, based on student's situation and knowledge)

6. An IEP is...
a document that describes your educational plan
an Individualized Education Program (or Plan)
the papers that tell what you'll be studying this year

7. (individual response, probably "Yes")

8. (individual response, based on student)

*These are possible, somewhat simplified answers that students might give or that you might offer. Please refer to the glossary for the more formal definitions of words such as disability, accommodation, and IEP.

Appendix C

Using the presentation on the laws as an example, the four components of Ms. McGahee's presentation look something like this:

Keyword Poster:

The Laws

94-142 Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)
- signed in 1975
- free appropriate public education (FAPE)
- IEP once a year
- legal document

101-476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- amendment (change)
- transition plan

Rehab Act Section 504
- accommodations
- examples:
  - books-on-tape
  - more time on tests
  - notetaker

The presentation follows the order of information on the keyword poster. If students are having difficulty understanding the material, they are permitted to stop her and request that information be repeated or said in a different way. She weaves stories of personal experience into the presentation — the types of disabilities that previous students have had and what types of accommodations they received to support their learning.

VISUAL: Ms. McGahee uses a copy of the *Congressional Report* on the different laws — the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the EHA, and the IDEA. This visual shows students *concretely* that these laws exist and are quite official. (See note below about obtaining a copy of the *Congressional Report.*)

NOTE-TAKING: Students take notes on her presentation, using the keyword poster as a starting point for their notes. (Some students may need accommodations or adaptations in notetaking, such as using another student's notes, using a tape recorder, adding words to a survival or reading word list, or using a computer.) The class goes over the notes they have taken, as part of a feedback loop about the note-taking process.

REVIEW: After the presentation on the laws is finished (it takes about 25–30 minutes), students are permitted to ask questions. The keyword poster is removed, and then Ms. McGahee asks the students questions about the laws; students use their notes and their memory to answer. Students are also permitted to share their notes, if this type of accommodation is appropriate for their learning needs.

Getting Copies of Laws or of the Congressional Report

Copies of federal laws are available from Superintendent of Documents, Attention: New Orders, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954. Charge orders may be telephoned to the U.S. Government Printing Office at (202) 512-1800. You need to be very specific about which laws you would like. For a copy of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ask for 34 CFR Parts 300–399. (This laws replaces the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), so you need not request a copy of the EHA.) For a copy of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended), ask for: 34 CFR Parts 100 to 106.

Copies of federal laws, as well as of the *Congressional Report*, may also be available from your Congressional representative. (The *Congressional Report* describes and summarizes laws in more everyday terms.) Write or call your representative and say you want the *Congressional Report* on a particular law (e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) or a copy of the law itself.

Glossary

The following definitions have been compiled from a variety of sources. The contents of this glossary do not necessarily represent definitions endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education but, rather, represent how the terms are generally used in the special education and disabilities field.

Accommodation—something that meets a need; in special education, "reasonable accommodation" refers to how schools and teachers adapt, adjust, or change the physical environment, instruction or services for a student with a disability so that the presence of the student's disability does not unnecessarily affect his or her learning. The accommodations that are made are based upon the student's special needs. Examples of reasonable accommodation include allowing the student to take a test in a quiet area, use a tape recorder in class to take notes, use another student's notes, or use textbooks on tape.

Amendment—a change, revision, or addition made to a law.

Appropriate—able to meet a need; suitable or fitting; in special education, children with disabilities are entitled to a "free appropriate public education," which means that the schools provide the education (public) at no cost to the student or his/her family (free) and that the education meets the student's special needs (appropriate).

Auditory Memory—the ability to remember the main features of something heard, and/or to remember the sequence of several items heard.

Cognitive—a term that describes the process people use for remembering, reasoning, understanding, and using judgment; in special education terms, a cognitive disability refers to difficulty in learning.

Disability—the result of any physical or mental condition that affects or prevents one's ability to develop, achieve, and/or function in an educational setting at a normal rate.

Due Process—action that protects a person's rights; in special education, this applies to a set of legal steps taken to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities and carried out according to established rules.

Dyslexia—a disturbance in a person's ability to read or learn to read.

Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA)—Public Law 94-142, passed in 1975, which mandated that schools provide children with disabilities with a free appropriate public education; among other things, this law specifies how students are to be assessed for the presence of a disability, how the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is to be developed collaboratively and reviewed at least once a year, and what educational rights children with disabilities and their parents have.

Educational Testing—the tests that schools give students to see how students are performing in various skill areas; the tests may be group-administered or individually-administered. Schools typically use group-administered tests to find out how large numbers of students are performing and to identify which students are having difficulties in school. Students who are performing below the level expected for an individual that age may be referred for further testing, to see if the student has a disability. If the student is being tested for the presence of a disability, then testing must be individualized.

EHA—see Education of the Handicapped Act, above.

Emotional Disorder—a condition that, under Federal definition, has one or more of these characteristics: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers; (c) behavior or feelings that are inappropriate under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Having an emotional disorder that adversely affects a student's educational performance makes a student eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Evaluation—the procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability and the nature and extent of the special education and related services the child needs; also refers to the procedures used to determine a student's progress and whether he or she has achieved the IEP goals and objectives.

Free Appropriate Public Education—often referred to as FAPE; one of the key requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which requires that an education program be provided for all school-aged children, regardless of disability, without cost to families; the exact requirements of "appropriate" are not defined; what is appropriate is to be determined by the team that plans each student's IEP, based upon an individualized evaluation of the student's abilities and needs.

Handicap—see disability.

Hearing Impairment—used to describe a wide range of hearing losses, which can be permanent or fluctuating; to be eligible for special education, the student must have a hearing loss that affects his or her educational performance.

IDEA—see Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, below.

IEP—see Individualized Education Program, below.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)—a written education plan for a child or youth with disabilities, developed by a team of professionals (teachers, therapists, etc.), the student's parents, and the student (as appropriate); the IEP is reviewed and updated yearly and describes how the student is presently doing, what the student's learning needs are, and what services the student will need.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)—an amendment to the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) passed in 1990 and amended again in 1991; changed the name of the legislation from EHA to IDEA, maintained the requirements of the EHA, and added the requirement of transition services for students aged 16 or older and, in many cases, younger.

Learning Disability—a disorder in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language; as a result of a learning disability, students may have difficulty listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Students with learning disabilities are eligible for special education and related services.

Least Restrictive Environment—an educational setting or program that provides a student with disabilities with the chance to work and learn to the best of his or her ability; it also provides the student as much contact as possible with students without disabilities, while meeting all of the child's learning needs and physical requirements.

Mental Retardation—A condition that causes individuals to function at an intellectual level that is generally significantly below average and to have difficulties with and deficits in social adjustment and adaptive behavior. Students with mental retardation are eligible for special education and related services.

Multidisciplinary—a team approach involving specialists from more than one discipline, such as a team made up of a physical therapist, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, a special education teacher, other specialists, and a student's parents.

Placement—the classroom, program, service, and/or therapy that is selected for a student with special needs.

Public Law 93-112—see Rehabilitation Act of 1973, below.

Public Law 94-142—see Education of the Handicapped Act, above.

Public Law 101-476—see Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, above.

Public Law 102-569—the most recent amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, passed in 1992.

Reasonable Accommodation—see Accommodation, above.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973—a federal law which addresses discrimination against people with disabilities; the law has different sections pertaining to different areas of discrimination. Of particular importance to school-aged students with disabilities is Section 504, which protects such students from being excluded, solely on the basis of their disability, from participation in any program or activity receiving federal funds. The law also introduced the concept of "reasonable accommodation."

Related Services—transportation and developmental, corrective, and other support services that a student with disabilities requires in order to benefit from education; examples of related services include: speech/language pathology, audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, counseling services, interpreters for those with hearing impairments, medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes, and assistive technology devices and services.

Screening—a procedure in which groups of children are examined and/or tested, in order to identify children who are at risk of educational or other problems; the children who are identified are then referred for more intensive evaluation and assessment.

Section 504—an important section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities; see Rehabilitation Act of 1973, above.

Special Education—programs, services, or specially designed instruction (offered at no cost to families) for children over 3 years old with special needs who are found eligible for such services; these include special learning methods or materials in the regular classroom, and special classes and programs if the student's learning or physical problems indicate this type of program.

Special Needs—often used in the phrase "a child with special needs," this term is used to describe a child who has disabilities or who is at risk of developing disabilities and who, therefore, requires special services or treatment in order to progress.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)—an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment that affects how a student progresses in school. This type of injury can result in impairments in one or more of the following areas: cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem-solving, sensory or motor abilities, behavior, information processing, physical functions, and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or those induced by birth trauma. Children with TBI are eligible for special education and related services.

Visual Memory—abililty to recall main features of something seen and/or to remember the sequence of several items seen.

Resources

A selection of resources is listed below to help readers locate more indepth information on the many issues raised in this technical assistance guide to *Helping Students Develop Their IEPs*. We have also provided the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the publishers from which you can obtain these resources. This contact information is, of course, subject to change without notice. If you have difficulty locating a publisher, please contact NICHCY. Be aware that there are also many other books, articles, and videotapes available on such subjects as the laws, student involvement in the IEP process, self-determination, and transition planning; the list below is intended to serve as a starting point.

Many states have projects in self-determination, transition planning, or student involvement in the IEP. To find out if any such project exists in your state, contact your local director of special education, your state director of special education, or the National Transition Alliance for Youths with Disabilities, at the Transition Research Institute in Illinois, telephone: (217) 333-2325.

Information About the Laws

Children's Defense Fund. (1989). *94-142 and 504: Numbers that add up to educational rights for children with diabilities*. Washington, DC: Author. (Available from the Children's Defense Fund, 25 E Street N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Telephone: (202) 628-8787.)

Copenhaver, J. (1995). *Section 504, An educator's primer: What teachers and administrators need to know about implementing accommodations for eligible individuals with disabilities*. Logan, UT: Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center. (Available from Mountain Plains RRC, Attention: Shauna Crane, 1780 N. Research Parkway, Suite 112, Logan, UT 84321. Telephone: (801) 752-0238.)

Küpper, L. (Ed.). (1993). Questions and answers about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. *NICHCY News Digest, 3*(2), 1–16. (Available from NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285; (202) 884-8200.)

Involving Students in IEP Development / Transition Planning

Curtis, E., & Dezelsky, M. (1995). *It's my life: Preference-based planning for self-directed goal meeting* [facilitator's guide, student goal planner workbook, and reproducible masters]. Salt Lake City, UT: New Hats. (Available from New Hats, P.O. Box 57567, Salt Lake City, UT 84157. Telephone: (801) 268-9811.)

Ebbs, P. (1995, February). Student participation in transition: From invitation to involvement. *SARRC Reports*, 1–8. (Available from the South Atlantic Regional Resource Center, 1236 North University Drive, Plantation, FL 33322. Telephone: (305) 473-6106.)

Full Citizenship, Inc. (1994). *It's your choice: Planning for life after high school* [manual and videocassette]. Lawrence, KS: Author. (Available from Full Citizenship, Inc., 211 East 8th Street, Suite F, Lawrence, KS 66044. Telephone: (913) 749-0603.)

Huff, B. (1994). *Transition: A handbook for parents, students, and advocates*. Irvine, CA: Irvine Unified School District. (Available from Irvine Unified School District, Attention: Marion B. Zenoff, 5050 Barranca Parkway, Irvine, CA 92714.)

Marshall, L.H., Martin, J.E., Maxson, L., & Jerman, P. (1995). *Choosing employment goals* [teacher's manual, student materials, and videocassette]. Colorado Springs, CO: University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Special Education Program. (Available from November 1995 through

February 1996 from University of Colorado Springs, Special Education Program, P.O. Box 7150, Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150. Telephone: 719-593-3627. From March 1996 on, contact Sopris West, P.O. Box 1809, 1140 Boston Avenue, Longmont, CO 80502-1809. Telelphone: 1-800-547-6747; (303) 651-2829.)

Marshall, L.H., Martin, J.E., Maxson, L., & Jerman, P. (1995). *Taking action* [teacher's manual, student materials, and videocassette]. Colorado Springs, CO: University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Special Education Program. (See contact information for availability immediately above, under Marshall et al. reference.)

Martin, J.E., Marshall, L.H., Maxson, L., & Jerman, P. (1993). *Self-directed IEP* [teacher's manual, student workbook, and 2 videocassettes]. Colorado Springs, CO: University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Special Education Program. (See contact information for availability immediately above, under Marshall et al. reference.)

Matuszak, T., Langel, P., Goldberg, M., & Goldberg, P. (1992). *Begin the between: Planning for the transition from high school to adult life.* Minneapolis, MN: PACER Center. [Available from PACER Center, 4826 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55417-1055. Telephone: (612) 827-2966; 1-800-537-2237 (in MN).]

Van Reusen, A.K., & Box, C.S. (1994, March/April). Facilitating student participation in individualized education programs through motivation strategy instruction. *Exceptional Children, 60*(5), 466–475.

Wandry, D., & Repetto, J. (1993). Transition services in the IEP. *NICHCY Transition Summary, 3*(1), 1–28. (Available from NICHCY, at contact information above.)

Wehmeyer, M. (1995). *Whose future is it anyway? A student directed transition planning program.* Arlington, TX: The Arc. (Available from The Arc, 500 East Border Street, Suite 300, Arlington, TX 76010. Telephone: 1-800-433-5255; (817) 261-6003.)

Self-Determination

Anderson, E., Seaton, K., & Dinas, P. (1995, September). *Fostering self-determination: A guide for educators.* Lawrence, KS: Full Citizenship, Inc. (See above for contact information on Full Citizenship, Inc.)

Field, S., & Hoffman, A. (in press). *Steps to self-determination.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed. (This curriculum includes an instructor's guide, a student's manual, and an assessment instrument. It is scheduled for publication in December, 1995 and will be available from Pro-Ed, 8700 Shoal Creek Boulevard, Austin, TX 78757. Telephone: (512) 451-3246.)

Van Reusen, A.K., Bos, C.S., Schumaker, J.B., & Deshler, D.D. (1994, December). *The self-advocacy strategy for education and transition planning.* Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprises, Inc. (Available from Edge Enterprises, P.O. Box 1304, Lawrence, KS 66044. Telephone: (913) 749-1473.)

This guide is part of NICHCY's *Technical Assistance Guide* series. NICHCY also disseminates other materials and can respond to individual requests for information. For further information or assistance, or to receive a NICHCY *Publications List*, contact NICHCY, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013. Telephone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TT) and (202) 884-8200 (Voice/TT).

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AED

Academy for Educational Development

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